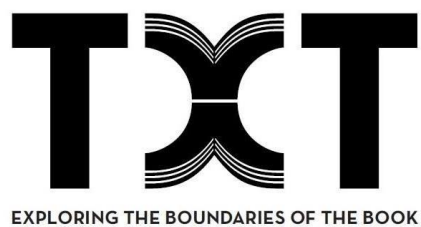


Cover Page



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Printing on Demand: A viable competition against online bookstores?

Since the advent of online bookstores, it was understandable that brick and mortar bookstores would suffer due to the ease of use and supposed wide selection offered by online bookstores. However, it became brutally apparent this past summer when the second largest bookstore, Borders, in America had to close its doors for good. For many, this brought the realization that bookstores were in a dire position, and that the internet has changed the ways in which bookstores needed to operate indefinitely. So in which ways can brick and mortar bookstores compete in a viable way with online bookstores? I will focus on a recent development, printing on demand in brick and mortar bookstores, and in which ways this new form of printing may attract more customers, but does not form valid competition against online bookstores.

Printing on demand, as the name suggests, is a way in which through use of a machine, the user is able to print a text on the spot without a long wait. The machines for printing on demand have been around for a few years now. An interview from 2007 featured on www.FuturePerfectPublishing.com with Dane Neller, the CEO of the Espresso Book Machine, mentions two machines that were active at that time, with more being installed in the fall of 2007. Since then, two have recently found their way into two local bookstores located in the Netherlands, both in The American Book Center shops, one in Amsterdam and the other in The Hague. To compete with online bookstores, printing on

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“To compete with online bookstores, printing on demand must offer not only something similar to online bookstores, such as a wide collection of books and have them be easily attainable, but something else as well, to make it the more attractive option.”

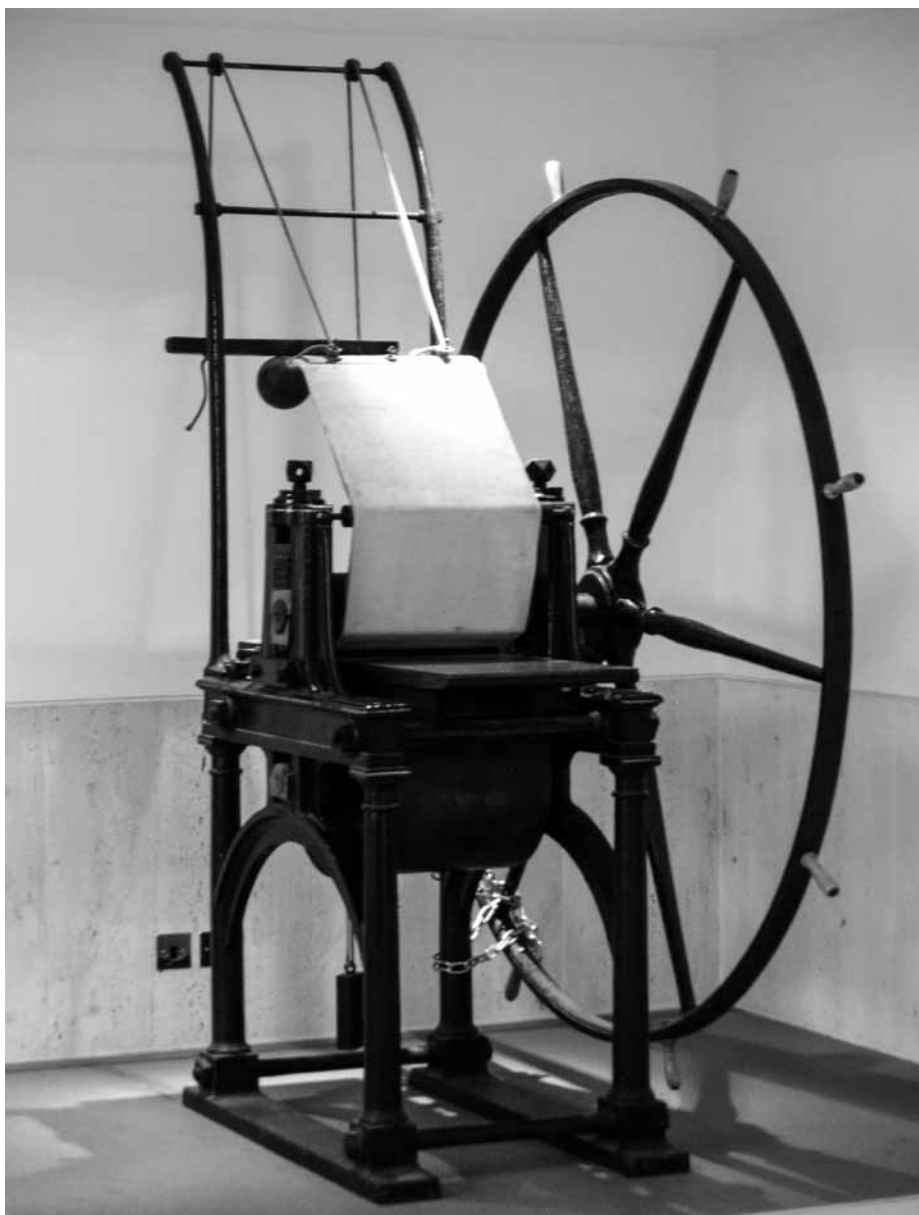
demand must offer not only something similar to online bookstores, such as a wide collection of books and have them be easily attainable, but something else as well, to make it the more attractive option. The website for the Espresso Book Machine, www.ondemandbooks.com, lists next to the header that: “Books printed in minutes onsite for immediate in-store pick-up, same day or overnight delivery”. What printing on demand seems to offer is quick printing and quick delivery. In their section listed as executive overview, they provide one advantage of EBM, namely:

‘Our technology replaces the centralized supply chain for the distribution of physical books — essentially unchanged since Gutenberg — with a radically decentralized, direct-to-consumer distribution model. In other words, global search capability with local print fulfillment.’

The Espresso Book Machine claims that with their machine, it is possible

to get any book desired available globally, without a long delivery time as it can be printed locally, and without the restrictions that may be placed on a book by the book’s distributor. The ability to obtain a book independent from restrictions by distributors does offer something that online bookstores cannot, as online bookstores are still reliant on the supplies provided by local distributors.

Despite being attractive due to its originality, and the ability to gain access to books not available by local distributors, printing on demand has drawbacks as well, with one of the largest being possibly the copyright restrictions. The American Book Center website lists the different collection of titles offered on site, the first being publisher clients of Lighting Source, Inc. TM, the second being Google Books which is their collection of open sourced titles, the third being Open Content Alliance and finally titles from “Numerous major publishers, content aggregators, and foreign-



language content, representing additional titles, journals, and other material.” In total, the Espresso Book machine at the ABC offers around 3 million book titles available on demand. From a critical perspective, the list seems to offer majorly open source titles or text books. It is only by the “numerous major publishers” that the titles offered may be more of the type that could compete with online bookstores, in that they may offer bestsellers. However, a short search for bestseller titles through the EBM catalogue returned no matches that offered the actual book. It seems that while the amount offered may seem quite abundant, the majority of the titles are not books commonly bought via online bookstores.

Another important aspect of printing on demand, namely the price, must be

analyzed as well. Despite how convenient the machine may be, if the price is not suited for the product, it will not sell. As the lack of results for bestsellers made it impossible to compare the price of one bestseller bought via an online bookstore and one bought via the printing on demand, I decided to look at the cost of Shakespeare, as his works are readily available as open source material. Examining *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, a work totaling 132 pages, the cost of printing on demand comes to the price of €20.99. The cheapest, non-digital book offered by the website www.Bol.com offers a paperback for €3.99. Including shipping and handling, the total comes to €5.94, nearly one fourth of the cost of the same work printed on demand. The examination other works of Shakespeare, to have an understanding of price comparison,

shows that all of Shakespeare’s works, published by BiblioLife, start at around €20.99 and increase in price depending on the number of pages. A selection of Shakespeare’s plays, totaling 300 pages, nearly twice as much as *The Tempest*, costs €26.99. The price is therefore not a reflection of material costs, as nearly doubling the amount of material results in only a third increase in price. The price seems to be a reflection of the publisher, as not all books provided in the EBM database start at €20.99, and therefore is not a set starting price for printing on demand. For example, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, published FQ Classics totaling 120 pages, is available for €8.55. However, in comparison again to the cheapest copy available on www.bol.com for €2.99, the price is still much more affordable via online bookstores.

Looking at not only the price of printing on demand, but also at the restrictions placed on printing on demand by copyright issues, as it stands now, printing on demand will most likely not become popular enough to compete with online bookstores. Online bookstores provide the user with the impression that any book is available for a cheap price, and with the ease of use by shipping that book to the user’s front door. Printing on demand, while novel, is expensive, only allows the printing of materials which the printer has the rights to and is in many cases mostly open source material, and requires the user to leave their house and travel to the bookstore. Unless printing on demand becomes less expensive and more dynamic, online bookstores will retain their grasp on the market.

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